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Modoc NS17

[Klamath Reservation]



as their human instrument; by contrast in the Klamath phrasing they are the shaman's "helpers."

However differently they construe the degree of individual access to the sources of power, both peoples recognize that human accomplishments are contingent upon it. Thus even those who have not secured a song appeal to the powers by prayer in the sweathouse. Because success is seen as a reward for virtuous striving and likewise as a token of supernatural aid, the universe appears basically to be a moral order.

In human society, success has its outward manifestations. The annual round of the food quest, the unremitting demands of the progression of plant and animal harvests, set a premium upon industry. "Work hard, so that people will respect you," is a theme that runs through the counsels of the elders and the periodic exhortations of headmen. The leading men are exemplars of this virtue, and the wealth they have thus amassed permits them to maintain several wives, while their generosity attracts a following. Aboriginally, the difference between these men and the common tribesmen is less than it will presently become, yet a contrast is already apparent. Only the daughters of prominent men undergo the most elaborate form of the puberty dance. In war, a leader is chosen in part because of the lavishness of his panoply. After death, when the body is cremated, that of a man of property is likely to be decked with many valuables contributed by those wishing to honor his memory. In myth, the man of prowess is depicted as possessing shamanlike foreknowledge. These heroes do not bustle about their affairs but send out emissaries on their business. Theirs is the restraint of power in reserve, for when the time is ripe they move inexorably to the destruction of their foe. That quality is well delineated in the deed recounted of the historic Klamath chief, Chiloquin:

> Old chief Chiloquin was quite a man, short but very strong. He was a *chief!* One time people were fighting; they were fighting all the time. *He* didn't care; he just slept there in his tent. Then about evening, he woke up. He says to his wife, "Bring me some water to wash my face." And when he had washed his face, he says, "Bring me some food and something—some coffee —to drink." And when he had eaten and drunk, he said, "Bring me my horse." And he took his weapons and got on his horse, and *all alone* he beat them. He was a wonderful man!

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## THE ELEMENTARY DEITIES.

In the Klamath theology the deities of the elements have preserved almost intact their character as representatives of the powers of nature. Imperfectly anthropomorphized as they are, they appear rather as spirits than as gods; all of them, the Earth perhaps excepted, are of the male sex. Like the animal genii they assume the adjectival suffix -ámtchiksh, abbr. -amtch *bygone, ancient, belonging to the past*,* though less among the Modocs than in the northern chieftaincy. The splendor, power, and awe-inspiring qualities of these superhuman beings is not diminished in the least by the grotesque exterior and acts ascribed to some of them. The sky gods were more plastically defined by popular imagination than the subterranean deities, and hence we begin our sketch with the former.

### K'MÚKAMTCH.

Ille mihi par esse deo videtur,
Ille, si fas est, superare divos.

The chief deity of the Klamath people, the creator of the world and of mankind, is K'múkamtch, or the "Old Man of the Ancients," the "Primeval Old Man." The full form of the name is K'muk'-ámtchiksh, and Modocs frequently use the shorter form Kĕmúsh, K'músh, an abbreviation of k'mútcha, *he has grown old, he is old*, or of its participle k'mutchátko, *old*. He is also named P'tísh-amtch nálam, *our old father*. He was also designated P'laitálkni, *the one on high*, though the term is now used for the God of the Christians. In every way he is analogous to the "old man above" or the "chief in the skies" of the Indians of Central California.

What the Indians say and think of their chief deity I have outlined in the Dictionary, pages 138–140, and what follows here will substantiate the data given there. Though K'múkamtch is reputed to have created the earth, what is really meant is only the small portion of the globe known to and inhabited by this mountaineer tribe, and not the immense terrestrial globe, with its seas and continents. Neither have these Indians an idea of what the universe really is when they call him the creator and

* In Nahuatl we may compare the reverential suffix -tzin, and in Shoshoni dialects the parallel one of -pitch, -bits; e. g., múbu *owl* in Bannock is mû'mbits *owl* in the Shoshoni of Idaho.

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maintainer of the universe. The Indians do not claim that he created the world with all in it by one single and simultaneous act, but when he is creating, metamorphosing, or destroying, his acts are always special, directed towards certain objects only. After making the earth, the lakes, islands, prairies, and mountains he gave a name to each locality (p. 142, 1 sqq.). Some of these names must be regarded as giving indications as to the earliest places inhabited by these Indians, especially when they designate fish-traps and ceremonial sudatories. Thus on Upper Klamath Lake we find Kû'mbat, Túkwa, Tulísh, Kohâshti as fishing places, Ktá-i-Tupáksi and Yulalóna as fish-traps, the special gifts of the deity to the people. Other places of this kind are Shuyakē'kish and Ktá-i-Tupáksi. In the old Modoc country, on Lower Klamath Lake, there is a rock shaped like a crescent and called Shapashχē'ni, because "sun and moon once lived there." On Sprague River there is a hill called "at K'múkamtch's Lodge"—K'mútcham Látsashkshi. Other legendary residences of the deity were at Yámsi, "Northwind's residence," a high mountain east of Klamath Marsh; others on Tule Lake, at Nílakshi Mountain; and finally K'múkamtch was changed into the rock Ktá-iti, which stands in the Williamson River (q. v.). The old people of both chieftaincies remember many localities alleged to have been the theater of his miraculous deeds.

K'múkamtch creates the Indians from the purplish berry of the service-tree or shad-bush (*Amelanchier canadensis*, in Kl. tchák), and the color of both has evidently suggested this idea. He also provides for man's sustenance by supplying him with game and fish and the means to capture them; also with the necessary vegetal products. Objects noticeable through their peculiar shape are called after him, e. g., the *thistle*, the piercer of K'múkamtch, K'mukámtcham kä'k. A peculiar haze sometimes perceptible in the west or northwest, shnúish, is regarded as his precursor or that of his son Aíshish.

Although but a passing mention is made of a wife or wives of his, K'múkamtch has a family. The myths speak* of a father, of a daughter, and of Aíshish, his son "by adoption," as members of it. The name of his

* Cf. Texts, pg. 100, 2: skäk'sh p'tís-lúlsham. Mention is made of one-eyed wives of Skē'l and of Tchâshkai.

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daughter is not given, but she represents the clouded or mottled evening sky. When she leads him to the under-world they meet there a vast crowd of spirits, who for five nights dance in a large circle around a fire, and on each of the intervening days are changed into dry bones. K'múkamtch takes with him some of these in a bag, and when reaching the horizon at daybreak throws the bones around the world *in pairs* and creates tribes from them, the Modoc tribe being the last of these. Then he travels in the path of the sun till he reaches the zenith, builds his lodge, and lives there now with his daughter.

K'múkamtch also figures as the culture-hero of his people; but since he does so only in *one* of the myths which came to our knowledge, this myth may be borrowed from some neighboring tribe. In that myth the primitive arts and practices, as hunting and bow-and-arrow making, are taught by him to men, as was done also by Quetzalcoatl, by Botchika, and in Oregon by the Flint-Boy of the Kalapuyas, in whom the sun's rays were personified.

What the national myths relate of him is not of a nature to make him an object of divine veneration. He resembles men in every particular, is born and dies, acts like other Indians, travels about with companions, starts on gambling jaunts, is indigent and often in want, and experiences more misery throughout his eventful career than Zeus ever did on account of his illicit love-making. Like the chief gods of other Indian nations, he is the great deceiver and trickster for all those that have dealings with him, is attacked and drubbed repeatedly for his meanness and crimes; but after coming out "second best" or being killed over and over he recuperates and comes to life again just as if nothing had occurred to disturb him. Compared with other fictions representing powers of nature, he is fully the equal of such characters as Nanabozho and Gluskap, or of the Kayowē demiurge Sínti, "the Deceiver." Some of the most attractive fictions describe the various tricks and stratagems by which K'múkamtch allures his son Aíshish into perilous situations, from which rescue seems impossible. Prompted by him to climb a tall pine-tree, he would have perished on it by hunger had not his charitable wives, the butterflies, succored him in time. The general conflagration by which the earth and its inhabitants

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were consumed through a rain of burning pitch was also brought about by K'múkamtch's hatred for his son. Aíshish escapes from this inhuman persecution, and subsequently seeks to revenge himself upon his father. Aíshish's son jerks off the glowing tobacco-pipe from his grandfather's neck and throws it into the fire; Aíshish pushes it farther into the flames until burnt, and thereby K'múkamtch's death is brought about.

It is singular that when he and his son Aíshish are expected to join social or gambling parties the other participants always experience some difficulty in recognizing the one from the other. The camp-fire which K'múkamtch made on approaching the meeting-place was burning badly, the smoke seeming almost to stifle the flames; but that of his son, purple-blue in color, sent the smoke straight up, while the fire of Silver Fox, the companion of K'múkamtch, was yellow. When shooting at the mark, Aíshish's arrow hit it every time, but the arrow of K'múkamtch struck the ground short of the mark. While gambling, Aíshish became the winner of all his companion's stakes.

Assuming the mask of the Marten (Skē'l, Skē'lamtch), K'múkamtch sends out his younger brother, Weasel (Tcháshkai), to look out for one-eyed women and to bring them home as wives (Texts, pp. 107–118). Both try to stop the Northwind and the Southwind at the very orifice whence they are blowing. Weasel loses his life in the attempt, but Marten kills both winds. After Weasel has come to life again, both proceed to the lodge of the five brothers, the Thunders. When inside of the lodge Marten puts on the head-cover of the dead Northwind, and the Thunders feel his gigantic power. At night an internecine fight takes place between the brothers, and while their lodge is on fire their hearts explode in succession.

From the almost infinite wealth of Klamath folklore many more particulars about this chief deity could be adduced, but what stands above is amply sufficient to indicate the powers of nature which he represents. The facts that Wán or Wanáka, *the sun-halo*, is his constant companion* and that the seat in the sky which he constantly holds is that of the sun at

* The sun-halo is an important factor in some Indian mythologies. The Zuñi Indians say that when a storm is brewing the sun retreats *into his house*, which he built for his safety, and after the storm he leaves it again. Among the Zuñis the sun is the principal deity also.

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noontime, would alone suffice to show that he represents the *sun*, the most potent, we may say unique factor in giving life, nourishment, and health to living organisms, the most important of the sky-gods, and the great center of myth production among all nations of the world. In one of the Modoc myths it is stated that "at the call of the morning star K'músh sprang from the ashes (of the fiery sky or aurora) as hale and as bright as ever, and so will he continue to live as long as the (solar) disk and the morning star shall last, for the morning star is the 'medicine' (múluash?) of the disk." In other myths he appears in the form of the golden or bright *Disk*, inhabiting the higher mountain ridges and becoming the suitor of females afterwards deified. Thus, like Hor, Rā, and Atum, he appears sometimes as the morning sun, at other times as the noonday and evening sun, and in the myths referring to weather he is either the summer or the winter sun. The burning pipe which Aíshish's son takes from his grandfather and destroys in the camp-fire represents the sun setting in a glowing red evening-sky. As the summer sun with his gigantic power he brings on a conflagration of the world and as a cloud-gatherer he causes an inundation. In the warm season he appears wrapt up in haze and fogs, which the myth in its imagery represents as "a smoky camp-fire," almost impenetrable to the sun-rays: "his arrows fall to the ground before they reach the mark."* To typify his sagacity and omniscience, K'múkamtch appears under the symbolic mask of a quadruped, the *pine-marten* or Skē'l, in Modoc Tchkē'l, which changes its black winter fur to a brown coating in the hot months of the year, and thereby became a sort of portent to the Indian. Similar changes occur with all the fur animals, but with the marten the difference in the color appears to be greater than with others. Şkē'l sends his brother Tcháshgai, or *Weasel*, to obtain one-eyed women for both, these being sun and moon, which the Eskimos also represent as one-eyed, deified persons.† The North wind, which is blowing in alternation with the South wind, is attacked and killed by Skē'l. Here Skē'l represents the sun of the summer months, for the summer's heat defeats the cold blasts of the wintry

* Texts, pp. 99, 4 (shláyaks ak), and 5.

† Cf. the Maidu myth of Kodo-Yampē in Stephen Powers's "California Tribes;" Contributions to North American Ethnology, III, 293.

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773 and equinoctial seasons; when he places the North wind's hat upon his head
776 he puts an end to the noise of the Thunder brothers and then represents
772 the wintry sun.

821 The attitude which K'múkamtch observes toward his son Aíshish will be spoken of under the next heading. It is necessary to add that the former's position is by no means restricted to that of a solar deity; several of his attributes make him also a god of the sky, or at least of the clouds, for clouds and the weather's changes are due to the sun's agency. When the sun is environed by lamb-clouds, or a mottled sky, this is figuratively expressed by: "K'múkamtch has taken the beaded garments of Aíshish and
821 dressed himself in them." A peculiar red smoke or haze appearing in the northwestern or western sky, shnúish, announces his arrival; he is also recognizable by his bulky posteriors, or, as the Modocs say of him: "K'múkamtch múnish kutúlish gítko." By this they evidently refer to the white and heavy, mountain-shaped summer clouds.

Greek mythology depicts the fecundation of the earth by rain showers and thunder storms as the illicit amours of the sky-god Zeus with the wives and daughters of mortal men. Exactly in the same manner K'múkamtch, as sky-god, seeks to approach illicitly the numerous wives of Aíshish, of whom the majority refuse him, though he has by some stratagem previously removed their husband from the scene.

776 In the aboriginal mind the creation of organisms, vegetal and animal,
773 seems to be in connection with the fecundation of the earth, whereas the creation of the earth, world, or universe implies an act entirely different. All the names of Klamath localities are said to come from K'múkamtch. The manner in which he created plants and animals was, as we are told in one Modoc myth, by *thinking* and by *wishing*, this probably implying that after forming an idea of some creature he made that idea a reality by the strong energy of his will. Many creatures, especially birds and quadrupeds—even men—the myths tell us, were brought forth by him in this manner. The moral qualities ascribed to this deity are in keeping with what is known of his physical and intellectual powers. He provides for mankind, which he has created, but does not tolerate any contravention of his will; for he punishes bad characters by changing them into rocks or by

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773 776 Aíshish's camp fire is of a clear, bright purplish-blue color (yámnash-ptchi); he makes his shirts with his own hands and ornaments these and his leggings with all sorts of beads As a marksman he excels all his companions, whose arrows do not even strike the target (Texts, pag. 99, 4–6). According to the Modoc story his wives are Mole, Badger, Porcupine, Bitch, Crane, Mallard, two Maídiktak-birds, Wren, Tchektiti-bird, Yaulíliks or Snowbird, Butterfly, and a host of others; the Klamath Lake myth (Texts, p. 99, 9. 10) names five: Coot, Long-tailed Squirrel, Crane, Mallard, Chaffinch. Tcháshkai or Weasel, the younger brother of Skē'l, sometimes plays the part of Aíshish, but he is not found in this quality so constantly as his brother Skē'l is in that of K'múkamtch.

772 773 776 The various attributes ascribed to this deity by the myths show Aíshish to be in many respects similar to Quetzalcoatl of Nahuatl mythology, who has been made alternately the genius of the morning star, of the calendar and of the atmospheric changes. As to Aíshish and the personal beauty invariably ascribed to him, it may appear doubtful, in view of so many other complex attributes, which idea was the starting-point that created this mythic figure, and subsequently gathered other but less material attributes about this son of the sun. He could represent originally the morning star, or the rainbow or the moon, but after mature reflection upon his complex attitudes [821] I now believe him to be a lunar deity. The splendor of the full moon is of a yellow hue, like Aíshish's camp fire (käkä'kli) and the shadow of the famished Aíshish, as seen from below through the pine-trees of the forest, is the narrow crescent of the waxing moon following its disappearance at the new moon period. At the new or "dead" moon Aíshish is famished or dead, to revive again on the days following, and this, like other phases of the moon, which result from her changeable position in regard to the sun, are represented to be the result of the jealousy and enmity of K'múkamtch against Aíshish—and whenever Aíshish succeeds in killing his father, this implies the decrease of sun-heat during the winter season. No myth shows a more striking analogy to the "Birth of Aíshish" than that of the birth of Bacchus from the thigh of Zeus after the destruction of his mother Semele by a thunder-stroke caused by Zeus, the Sky-god.

[821] The moon is the originator of the months, and the progress of the

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772 773 776 821 months brings on the seasons with the new life seen sprouting up everywhere during spring and summer. So the quadrupeds and birds which are the first to appear after the long winter months are considered as the wives of Aíshish, and the flowers of summer vegetation are the beads of his garments. He enjoys more popularity than his father, for the moon's light is mild, not burning nor offensive, nor does it dry up vegetation and make men and beasts drowsy like the rays of the midday sun. Many nations also believe that the changes of weather are partly due to the phases of the moon. Although the "Birth of Aíshish" myth obtained by me represents Aíshish rather as the adopted than as the real son of K'múkamtch, other myths state him to be his son resulting from the union of the sun-disk to the red sky of the morning or evening, symbolized by the woman Le-tka-[19] káwash. We must recall to mind that the term for *father*, p'tíshap, in Modoc t'shíshap, is really the *nourisher, feeder*, and not the progenitor, for it is a derivative from t'shín *to grow*.* Most other mythologies consider the relation of sun to moon as that of man to wife, or of wife to man (cf. Deus Lunus), but here the thing is different. There are no female characters of importance in Klamath mythology, nor does the language distinguish grammatically between the sexes.

821 171 197 The difficulty which we experience to distinguish solar and lunar deities from each other in some of the American religions is caused by the circumstance that in many languages of this western hemisphere the term for *sun* and for *moon* is the same. In such languages both orbs are distinguished from each other by being called day-luminary, or night-sun, night-luminary, and with some tribes the belief has been found, that both are actually the same celestial body, one being merely the image or shadow of the other. In the Maskoki languages hási answers for both, but the moon is commonly called ní'li hási or "night sun." In the Tonica language táχtchiksh, abbrev. táχtchi stands for sun, moon, and star, but the moon is usually named lá-u táχtchi "night luminary," the stars táχtchi tipulá, while the sun is either áχshukun táχtchi, "day luminary" or simply táχtchi. Of the Tinné languages many have tsā, sā, of the Algonkin languages kísis or parallel forms for both celestial bodies, separate distinctions being

* Cf. the Grammar, in Appendix VI, p. 710.